

Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening



CEPPS/IFES Quarterly Report: 1 July – 30 September 2012

IRAQ: Elections Support Project (ESP)

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I. SUMMARY

The final quarter of FY12 ended well for IFES and the IHEC. Most importantly, a new Board of Commissioners (BoC) was selected and the Governorate Council Elections (GCE) law progressed in the Council of Representatives (CoR). As a response, IFES assistance to the IHEC has included more operational aspects, in addition to the longer-term institution capacity building contained in the FY12 project implementation plan (PIP). In the next quarter, IFES will work with the IHEC on such key operational issues as voter registration and voter education.

Q4FY12 was a transitional period. It started with considerable debate over whether a new BoC would be selected and if GCE elections would be carried out or not. IFES calculated that both would occur and continued its assistance with two GCE-related workshops (see Table 1 below for a list of workshops). A month after Ramadan, several GCE law amendments were approved and shortly thereafter a new BoC was seated with a strong desire to carry out elections next spring.

As elections planning continues, technical issues will need to be confronted before next spring. Primary among these is voter registry (VR) troubleshooting. In recent years the voter register in Iraq has made significant gains in terms of the efficiency of information collection procedures and mechanisms of data verification. These strides have resulted in an increase in the overall accuracy of the voter register. However, despite these improvements, several obstacles continue to impede some Iraqi citizens' ability to exercise their right to vote. Problems with voter lists, the voter registration process, and the voter registration form, continue to impact the overall quality of the voter register.

The weaknesses constitute the major challenges associated with the software and might add another burden during maintenance and troubleshooting at the peak of the data entry operations. IFES employed a VR consultant this quarter to assist the IHEC in plotting out means for improvement. Additionally, IFES also facilitated a workshop on the media plan for the voter registration update (VRU) ahead of the GCE. Similar VR support will continue in future quarters.

IFES also advised the IHEC on new media outreach tools such as the IHEC's webpage. A key achievement was the development of the Web Working Group (WWG) to guide development of the page. IFES provided the IHEC with input on the use of the social media networking website Facebook this past quarter. This support will continue moving forward, as better public outreach is critical for improving public perceptions of the IHEC's credibility.

IFES will also help to improve these perceptions through its nationwide survey and also through its sub-grant program. The survey will be implemented next quarter and will establish the baseline of public opinion. IFES will share the results with the IHEC and USAID in order to determine how long-term outreach activities should be structured. The sub-grant program, whose Request for Applications (RFA) was approved by USAID this quarter, will aim to initiate funding civil society organizations (CSOs) before the end of the calendar year.

With regard to internal developments in the IHEC, IFES facilitated a workshop on budget execution and MS Excel, which provided the foundation for introducing automation into future budgets, thereby improving the efficiency of financial planning operations. In addition to this, IFES continued preparatory work on the Strategic Planning component of its project, which will hopefully be implemented after elections next year.

At the time of reporting, IFES, in conjunction with its Agreement Officer's Representative at USAID, was in the process of creating an updated Performance Management Plan (PMP) and FY13 Project Implementation Plan (PIP). Both will be submitted to USAID through CEPPS at the end of October. IFES is expecting to receive decisions from USAID on its sub-award approval requests for life support and a new security provider. IFES submitted approval requests in June and has been working closely with USAID in the interim to address remaining items.

Table 1: IFES-facilitated Trainings and Workshops, July – September 2012 (Q4FY12)¹

Date	Location	Title	Total Participants	# of Female Participants	NO/GEO Participant Distribution
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¹ See Appendix D for a full table of IFES-facilitated workshops for FY12.

8 – 11 July	Erbil	GCE Operations	35	1	15/20
5 – 8 August	Erbil	GCE VRU Media Plan	28	6	12/16
8 – 13 September	Erbil	Budget Formulation and Excel	31	5	7/24
Total workshop participants			94	12	34/60

II. POLITICAL CONTEXT

Iraqi politics experienced two major electoral developments this quarter: the completion of the nomination process for the IHEC's new Board of Commissioners and the adoption of several amendments to the Provincial Election Law (Law 36, 2008) ahead of the Governorate Council Elections (GCE), which are likely to be held early next year.

The BoC selection processes took longer than expected with the ninth and final Commissioner not named until the very end of September; though, given that Iraq previously held a world record for the longest time to form a government, perhaps it should not come as a surprise. The drawn out selection process required four extensions to the former BoC and extensive debate over the political and numerical composition of the incoming group. This occurred despite no law governing the BoC formation other than including at least two lawyers².

Commissioner selection was subject to the same political wrangling found elsewhere in Iraq. What is particularly notable about the BoC, however, is the extent of the back-and-forth between the blocs, especially given the purported independence of the IHEC in the first place. From early on, the State of Law (SoL) grouping, headed by Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, wanted to expand the number of seats from 9 to 15. SoL claimed this was to build a more inclusive Commission. In reality, it was likely designed to lessen the perceived hostility of the previous board to the Prime Minister's leadership; with more Commissioners, the relative percentage of seats for other parties would decrease. However, parts of the Iraqiyya party, led by former Prime Minister and challenger to Maliki, Ayad Allawi, were against increasing the number. When put to a vote, the changes were rejected in Parliament. In the end, four seats were allocated to the National Alliance, of which SoL is a part, two were given to Iraqiyya, two were allocated to Kurdish representation, and one went to a female Turkmen.

Of the four seats allocated to the National Alliance, two went to SoL, with one each also going to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Sadrist Movement. SoL managed to pick up one seat as only one previous Commissioner was considered close to the Prime Minister, and the party also acquired the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) position.

The overall impact of the new BoC's make-up is threefold. First, the BoC's composition may affect sub-national elections. As election operations become less centralized, governorate councils may experience more technical autonomy from the National Office. Should a party have representation on the BoC, they may be able to maintain a semblance of political influence over the GEOs, thereby ensuring that local representatives keep to party lines or the preferred local favorites are put forth as job candidates in the electoral offices.

² The dates and terms of the extensions are as follows: 18 April, three months or until selection of a new BoC; 28 July, 10-day extension; 6 August, 35-day extension; 3 September, 15-day extension.

Second, smaller parties have even more constraints on their efforts to enhance representation in government institutions. Similar to the way the Provincial Election Law constrains their ability to pick up seats (see below) the lack of representation by small parties in the BoC will hinder their ability to represent their constituents. This may be remedied by ensuring that the Deputy Commissioners and Directors of the IHEC are drawn from smaller political entities, but such a situation cannot be guaranteed.

Third, the final make-up of the BoC does not bode well for advancing gender issues at the higher levels of Iraqi government. It should be noted that approval for Commissioners occurred in two votes – the first was for eight Commissioners and the final vote for the ninth. None of the initial eight confirmed Commissioners are women. An Iraqi politician remarked that over 7,500 people applied for the nine seats, but in the end only the best candidates were chosen. Whether this means that there was only one qualified female candidate or that the Committee of Experts tasked with selecting the Commissioners ignored gender equity is irrelevant – the imperative to advance women’s representation in Iraqi government institutions remains as strong as ever.

In addition to the new Board being selected, this quarter also saw numerous readings of the Provincial Election Law. Amendments to the law dealt with several issues, including: special needs voting; allocation of seats per district; and, tabulation processes. On 1 August, Parliament voted on a series of amendments, resulting in discontent. The issue was the allocation of seats to smaller parties. These groups charged that the amendments ignored a Federal Court mandate to change the original 2008 law, which allocated inconsequential votes received by small parties to the larger blocs. The Court ruled this arrangement unconstitutional.

The Council of Representatives voted on a revised set of amendments in September, but the issue of seat allocation to small parties remained unresolved³. This development may be indicative of future elections, in which Iraqis are essentially forced to vote along politico-sectarian lines, rather than identifying with new parties based on political ideology or national identity.

Also included in the September amendments to the provincial election law was the decision to use the IHEC’s voter database to prepare the voter list. Article 3 of the August amendments included the use of the database from Central Office for Statistics to prepare the voter list. The IHEC successfully convinced the CoR of the logistical hindrance this would cause, eventually reverting back to the IHEC’s own database.

Taken together, the selection of the new BoC and the Provincial Election Law amendment process impacted both the electoral calendar and IFES operations. With regard to the date of elections, the GCE was originally scheduled for January 2013, but with approval of amendments to Law 36 coming only in August and September, the date shifted to February at the earliest. When combined with the delayed selection of the BoC, elections were re-scheduled for spring, though with no fixed date.

³ The issue of elections in Kirkuk remains unresolved as well; while the rest of Iraq may have the GCE, Kirkuk may not.

Operationally, IFES has had to further delay implementation of the strategic planning component of the project. A number of preparatory activities have gone ahead, but with the new BoC intent on demonstrating its operational nous, strategic planning is not currently its priority. IFES has nevertheless kept the item relevant by engaging in discussions with the new Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) and BoC, with an eye to fully carrying out the strategic planning cycle as soon as the GCE is complete.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES⁴

Objective 1: IHEC's Strategic Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Capacity is Strengthened

Despite the lengthy BoC selection process, the IFES Iraq team stood ready to implement the strategic planning aspect of ESP. Preparatory work included internal analysis of IFES-facilitated assessments of the National Office and GEOs, along with development of a strategic planning presentation by an international consultant. With the new Board in place, IFES will, in the coming quarters, begin implementing this component of ESP.

Activity 1.1: Development of an IHEC Strategic Plan

IFES was able to complete a number of activities related to the development of an IHEC Strategic Plan this past quarter. However, most of these activities were preparatory, given the delayed selection of the new Board of Commissioners.

1.1.1: Induction workshop on strategic planning for senior IHEC staff and establishment of IHEC strategic planning bodies

IFES employed a strategic planning consultant during this past quarter. The consultant developed material for an introductory workshop on strategic planning that IFES will implement in the near future. The material included an introductory presentation on the basics of strategic planning. While the IHEC has experience in strategic planning, many, including those inside the

IFES-UN COOPERATION: A YEAR IN REVIEW

IFES and the UN have offered mutual support to one another this quarter, continuing the effective working relationship established throughout the course of the project thus far.

In the past three months, IFES and the UN have coordinated efforts in public outreach and operational issues. On 28 August, the IFES Chief of Party, Deputy Chief of Party, and External Relations Specialist met with their UN counterparts to brief each other on staff responsibilities, the IHEC's website, the IHEC's Gender Working Group, and outreach activities ahead of the Governorate Council Elections. IFES will be focusing on social media and issues related to disability, while the UN will focus on the IHEC's webpage and gender.

Over the past twelve months, the two institutions have typically held formal coordination meetings once or, sometimes, twice each quarter. These meetings have resulted in operational divisions of labor and have enabled each to maximize the resources available to them.

⁴Only those activities from the PIP which are relevant to this quarter are being discussed and activity numbering is per PIP

institution, were not impressed with the 2007 – 2012 Strategic Plan. IFES therefore engaged its consultant in part to ensure that the foundations for strategic planning were in place. This approach will provide the IHEC with the fundamentals for the process, hopefully resulting in a better final product in several months time.

1.1.3: Conduct of internal and external organizational assessments

Over the past two quarters, IFES has been managing the ongoing conduct of internal and external assessments within the IHEC's various departments. As reported in the last Quarterly Report, IFES has already received a number of these from IHEC's respective Departments. This quarter, IFES acquired the finalized assessment from the Capacity Building Department. IFES' Chief of Party and Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator are currently reviewing it to pull out key findings.

Some of the highlights from the CBD assessment are as follows:

- The training records database is currently an insufficient repository of past training programs and accomplishments and staff needs more training on its use.
- A number of procedures and forms used by the CBD for internal processes are out of date and not relevant to current activities.
- There are no useful, standardized datasets currently in use to track the progress of CBD activities.

IFES will continue its analysis of the assessment and collaborate with CBD management on addressing the discovered shortcomings. Additionally, the collated assessments will be presented to the Board ahead of the formal initiation of the Strategic Planning trainings and exercises. They will also be used to inform IFES activity planning in the year to come.

1.1.5: Development of the IHEC Strategic Plan

As stated above, IFES has taken preparatory steps in assisting the IHEC develop its Strategic Plan. In the upcoming quarter, IFES will be able to ascertain when the Strategic Planning process will begin in earnest. According to information available at the time of reporting, it is likely that Strategic Planning will begin at some point after the GCE next spring.

The IHEC has indicated a reluctance to take staff away from elections planning for considerable lengths of time and prefers to focus on the successful implementation of the GCE. IFES understands and agrees with this logic, given that the GCE will be the first elections held under the new BoC.

Activity 1.4: Facilitation of Transition to a new Board of Commissioners in 2012

With the new BoC in place, IFES is eager to begin facilitating the commissioners' transition. After the ninth and final Commissioner was named in late September, IFES held a number of meetings with the IHEC Directors on the likely direction of the new Board. After this, IFES Chief of Party had a productive meeting with both the Chief Electoral Officer and Chairman of

the Board on IFES' continued activities, both in the immediate and long-term future. Both of the IHEC representatives indicated their familiarity of and appreciation for IFES' work with the Commission.

1.4.1: Preparation of detailed briefings by the IHEC Departments and Sections to the new Board of Commissioners

IFES has a draft agenda for a BoC Orientation Workshop to possibly take place at some point next quarter, pending electoral preparation activities. This five day course, to be led by the Chief of Party, includes the following topics:

- Institutional and Organizational Framework of the IHEC
- Electoral Legal Framework and Dispute Resolution
- The IHEC Composition and Roles
- Overview of Electoral Operations
- Financial Operations

However, these topics and the length of the training may change, given the high level of familiarity the BoC has with the IHEC already.

1.4.2: Specialized training course for new Commissioners

At the end of the reporting period, IFES elaborated its vision of specialized training courses for the new Commissioners. The format for these courses is still under discussion.

The first option is for IFES to implement a specialized training course on Strategic Planning in order to provide the BoC with specific instruction on EMB planning, along with lessons learned from previous IHEC Strategic Plans. The timing of a potential course like this is not confirmed, given the BoC's attention on preparing for upcoming GCE elections.

The second specialized training course option is a pair of modified BRIDGE (Building Resources for Democracy, Governance and Elections) modules for the new Commissioners. These modules would deliver advanced content in such fields as international EMB best practices, complaints processes, and related issues.

Depending on the professional development objectives and requirements of the new BoC and the preparatory workload for GCE elections, IFES will implement one, both, or a mix of the above in the coming months.

Objective 2: IHEC's Internal Management Processes and Systems are Strengthened

With IFES' full complement of IT staff on board, comprehensive assistance was provided to the IHEC's IT Department this quarter. This consisted of development support for voter registration software and its ancillaries, along with a highly specific assessment carried out for server configuration in the IHEC's Data Entry Center (DEC). In addition to this, IFES continued its assistance to the Finance and Administration Departments. In September, IFES implemented a

workshop in Erbil on budget execution and the use of Microsoft Excel for the Finance Department and participants from other divisions involved in financial management. In the coming quarter, IFES is likely to focus more on voting-related software support, as institution building activities will take a secondary focus to elections preparation.

Activity 2.1: Support to the IHEC's IT systems and infrastructure

In order to help overcome chronic IT infrastructure problems, IFES advisors, including its local national IT staff, created a concise, but highly effective assessment of options the IHEC could take in upgrading its servers and creating an easy to follow maintenance routine.

The prompt for the assessment was threefold:

- Outline the current server configuration;
- Identify critical issues;
- Provide options for immediate upgrade and consistent maintenance.

While the technical minutiae are not included in this Quarterly, IFES has been asked to present the assessment to the Data Entry Center's (DEC) management in October in order to determine a course of action. Followers of ESP are well aware of the ongoing issues with the IHEC's IT infrastructure. It is hoped that with a concise assessment and the specter of impending elections, the IHEC's IT systems will finally get the upgrades they require.

IFES will provide more on this in the next quarter. However, at the time of reporting the assessment had won widespread praise from the IHEC's management.

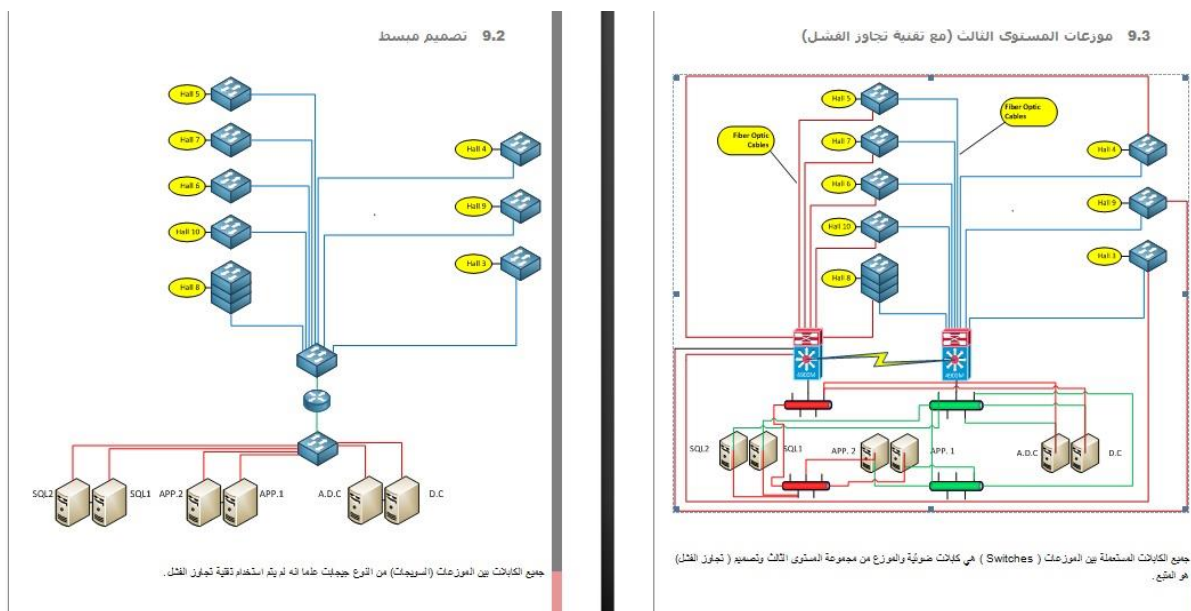


Figure 1: IFES' DEC Assessment

Activity 2.2: Capacity building support to the IHEC's database and software developers and staff

IFES' IT/Database (IT/D) Advisor worked closely with the IHEC's database staff this quarter in order to prepare for the GCE next spring. Most of this support was in the form of day-to-day advising on VRU software.

The software itself is based on previous iterations of VRU programs, but there are a number of flaws in the design and the technique used to develop the software as well as there are some bugs that require troubleshooting. Based on the evaluation of the software, the list of future improvements was identified. These improvements will be implemented in form of on-job trainings covering various aspects of the software development. The outcome of the trainings will be the ability of IHEC developers to create more structured, easily maintained, and future proof programs. Also, developers will be able to reuse created code for future developments such as results tabulation software. Finally, fixing the bugs is a fairly tedious process as the program has to be thoroughly tested, bugs and other issues are documented and then fixes are made.

Current VRU software is useable for the GCE elections next year, but IFES is committed to working with the IHEC to ensure that the quality of the database and data collection software remains as high as possible.

Activity 2.3: Support improvements to the voter registration process

IFES provided technical expertise on the voter registration (VR) process, as well as broader electoral operations this past quarter. This expertise was provided in the context of preparations for next year's Governorate Council Elections. To that end, IFES hired an international consultant to work with the IHEC on voter registration issues and also facilitated an Operations Workshop from 8 – 11 July in Erbil.

IFES' Election and Voter Registration consultant arrived on the project on 1 August and stayed until the end of September. During this time, the consultant worked primarily on compiling a report on improving the voter registration process. He also collaborated with Operations Department staff on training exercises for voter registration update for the GCE, development of the Preliminary Voter List (PVL), and items related to operational support.

In the report, the consultant put forth recommendations for improving the voter registration process, including the eventual introduction of dedicated voter identification cards. As the report was only finalized at the end of the quarter, IFES advisors are still analyzing the document to determine which recommendations will be shared with the IHEC for possible implementation.

In addition to the above, the IFES-facilitated Operations Workshop in July was a success. The 35 participants who attended the event were NO or GEO Directors or Deputy Directors and used the event to discuss the operational preparations for the 2013 GCE elections. They also began work on a draft timeline, discussed different phases within that document such as the VRU process, recruitment of staff for the voter registration centers (VRCs) and polling centers, administrative and financial requirements, and the public outreach plan.

A comprehensive list of recommendations was produced. Some of the key recommendations are summarized below:

- **Number of voters at the polling stations:** Each polling station should accommodate between 450 and 500 voters.
- **Voter register preparations:** The IHEC's voter records should be used to update the register in the field in coordination with the relevant ministries and departments.
- **GEO Roles:** The GEOs should have local responsibility for: printing preliminary voter lists and polling center guides; developing local media campaign plans; managing internal transportation contracts; recruiting staff; and, other tasks to accelerate preparatory work.
- **Voter registration update form:** The new form (333) should be printed and used for the VRU process.
- **VRCs staff:** All VRC job vacancies must be filled with applicants holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. If this qualification cannot be met, then people with a professional diploma, and then if that criterion cannot be met, those with a high school degree should be selected. Specific criteria were also established for selection process: 5 points for each elections candidate participated; 30/20/10 points respectively for bachelor's degree/diploma/high school degree; and 2 points for each month of previous work at the VRC.

IFES and the IHEC have reviewed the recommendations and hope to implement as many of the above as possible. IFES will be able to determine which recommendations were implemented when the GCE Operational Plan is made available next quarter.

In the meantime, IFES has continued recruitment for its Election Planning Advisor and also expects to conclude recruitment in early October. The advisor will work with the IHEC on implementing its operational plan and supporting voter registry improvements once he or she is formally brought onto the project.

Activity 2.4: Support to the IHEC's internal communication and reporting structures

In the previous quarterly, IFES reported that it would be holding a workshop designed to streamline and standardize the GEO-NO reporting process. However, this workshop was not held this quarter because of the prolonged BoC selection process and the impending GCE elections.

While IFES is committed to including electoral preparatory support under its overall institution building project, there will be instances when the IHEC management insists workshops focus on proximate problems, with institution building a corollary, rather than a primary feature. With that in mind, once the new BoC is firmly settled, it will be able to focus less on proving itself to the public through the successful implementation of a major election. At that point, IFES will be

able to fully include both sets of activities – election preparation and institution building – into the everyday life of the project.

Activity 2.5: Support to the IHEC Directorates of Finance and Administration with the introduction of financial controls, accounting, and finance systems

In July and August, IFES and the IHEC Audit and Internal Control Department established the Internal Control Systems Working Group (ICSWG). IFES Organizational Management Specialist has designed the ICSWG to provide a framework for the development and standardization of procedures related to the IHEC's Finance and Audit and Internal Control Departments.

The ICSWG met on a bi-weekly basis, with the first meeting taking place in the last week of August. At this meeting, the group charted short, medium, and long-term goals, along with identifying rules of procedure. Future meetings will include staff from all of the IHEC Departments, in order to ensure that the financial controls being implemented are appropriate for all of the IHEC's activities.

IFES will report more on the progress of the ICSWG in the next quarter.

Activity 2.6: Support to the IHEC Finance and Administration Directorates to improve staff capacity to prepare and execute budgets

In September, IFES' Organizational Management Specialist, alongside the IHEC counterparts, designed a workshop on budget execution and the use of MS Excel. The workshop was designed to provide basic automation to the budget process and will be followed-up with on-the-job trainings to reinforce instruction.

2.6.2: Conduct training on budget execution processes and the use of financial software in budget execution



Figure 2: Budget Execution Workshop, 9 - 13 September, Erbil, Iraq

IFES carried out an important training workshop on budget execution in Erbil in early September. Relying on Iraqi experts from within the IHEC and supported by IFES' Organizational Management Specialist, the workshop covered budgeting, budget formulation, budget execution, and budget driven reporting, all backed up by the use of MS Excel. It also

introduced how the IHEC's Estimated Budget is built and how the Operational Budget is executed. The 31 participants included the IHEC's Finance and Audit and Internal Control staff from both the NO and GEOs. As a computer-based workshop, this event combined instruction and application of new concepts.

The workshop was designed to produce the following:

- At least two new budget templates in Excel for use by various units for budget execution
- At least one new template in Excel for use by the Department of Audit and Internal Controls to perform financial and or operational audits
- At least one new report template using Excel that would allow real time updates to monthly budget reporting requirements

IFES will report on the implementation of the budget templates next quarter, as well as the extent to which the IHEC is able to take on increasingly advanced training under this activity.

In the meantime, the evaluation of this workshop is encouraging for future activities. Out of 28 participants who took both the pre- and post-workshop test, 25 participants, or 89% of the total attendees, indicated increased technical knowledge on the topics covered in the training.

Objective 3: IHEC Capacity to Manage External Affairs with Key External Stakeholders is Improved

IFES continued its technical assistance to the IHEC regarding improving the latter's ability to engage external stakeholders. Notable achievements this quarter were USAID's approval of IFES' sub-grant Request for Applications, IFES' successful contracting of a survey company and development of the sampling plan, and continued assistance to the Public Outreach Department, which included the successful creation of a media plan for outreach material ahead of the VRU for next year's GCE. Towards the end of the reporting period, public outreach activities started shifting towards preparations for the GCE elections next spring. IFES expects this to be the trend in the coming quarter and election preparations will be included as an overall component of ongoing institution building.

Activity 3.2: Conduct of national surveys

On 3 July, IFES gave a presentation on its survey to USAID's Mission Director, Democracy and Governance Office (DGO) Director and program staff, and other USAID personnel. The presentation was repeated for the IHEC BoC, Deputy CEOs, Directors, and the UN IEAT the next day. Both presentations gave their audiences the chance to learn more about the survey and to provide their comments.

In late July, IFES contracted the Jordanian-based survey firm IIACSS in order to assist with implementation of the national survey. With a contract in place, IFES and IIACSS were able to develop and finalize the survey questionnaire and design the sampling plan.

The questionnaire contains dozens of questions with topics related to elections and the IHEC's credibility, including:

- Voter information and media sources
- Opinions on voting and the election process in Iraq
- Familiarity with and opinion on the IHEC
- Voter eligibility awareness
- Voter registration awareness
- Youth and women involvement in electoral politics

The survey also has questions to acquire data on ethnicity, gender, location, and other useful metrics. Respondents will participate in a 45-minute face-to-face interview, and will be answering questions posed in either Iraqi Arabic or Sorani Kurdish.

The sampling plan calls for IIACSS to carry out over 2,900 interviews (including reserve interviews) in order to give an indicative assessment of the Iraqi population. Participant selection will be done according to a multi-stage, stratified probability proportional to size (PPS) selection method using random selection techniques. In other words, the groups will be separated by governorate and, then again separated into rural or urban. From these disparate groups, interviewees will be randomly selected. The probability of being selected will match the proportion of that group to the overall population. IFES' Applied Research Center (ARC) staff in Washington DC provided valuable input on the design of the sampling plan, which was approved by IFES on 30 September.

The survey will be launched next quarter, beginning with the pre-test and followed shortly by the full survey itself.

Activity 3.3 Development of an effective media relations strategy

IFES and the IHEC continued their efforts to enhance media relations capacity. Weekly IFES-POD meetings continued this quarter, which, as reported in the Q3FY12 Quarterly Report, was launched at the initiative of IFES External Media Advisor. The meetings, which are also attended by the UN outreach experts, have been resulted in recommendations for establishing a Communication Coordination Committee (CCC) to oversee the creation of a corporate communications strategy and the development of information and communication materials.

3.3.1: Development of a strategic communications plan

Part of the CCC's activities would be to oversee the development of the communications strategy for the IHEC. IFES has helped to develop a comprehensive training curriculum designed to result in the creation of a draft communications strategy. The work has been inclusive, incorporating all POD Section Heads, representatives from the Capacity Building Department, and the POD Director and Deputy Director.

Preparation for the workshop, which will be implemented next quarter, pending election preparations, has been extensive. For example, IFES provided POD staff with governmental

communication strategies drawn from across the region for study. Staff used the material to identify applicable strategies and congruent problems and solutions that other institutions in the Middle East have experienced. IFES External Media Advisor also gave an instructional session on developing a corporate communications strategy in July, as part of the preparation for this event.

Foundational work for the strategic communications plan continues and IFES hopes the IHEC is able to produce a working draft at some point next quarter.

Public Outreach Division Media Plan Workshop

In addition to the above, IFES also facilitated a workshop for the POD on 5 - 8 August in Erbil, in order to develop the Media Plan for the 2013 GCE VRU. The POD Media Plan for the governorate elections is a detailed document that outlines the necessary outreach products that will be implemented prior to the voter registration update.

Secondary objectives were to review dozens of recommendations made by the BoC relevant to Media Plan development; to discuss the 2010 national election VRU media plan to identify particular strengths from that outreach framework; and, to provide the GEOs with the base knowledge to develop their own sub-plans after the event.

The meeting brought together 16 POD unit heads from GEOs (including Kirkuk, but not Dohuk, Sulaimaniyah, or the KREO), the Deputy Commissioner for Operations, the Director and Deputy Director of the POD, and the section and unit heads from the NO. The workshop was attended by 28 people, six of whom are women.

In addition, a representative of the Graphics Design Section was invited; this was important because GEOs were not aware of the complexities of the graphic design process – particularly when it came to the local political symbolism of color or images and the time needed at every stage of the multi-media production process. Moreover, the inclusion of another non-POD employee was important to highlight the shared IHEC responsibility for public outreach. Also present was the UN National Consultant for surveys, who offered a presentation on the first day of the workshop.

As the main objective of the workshop was the production of a document - the media plan - the participants were not subject to the workshop learning tests. However, the POD, in conjunction with IFES, conducted an ability assessment. In the opinion of the IFES Advisor, those who participated in the assessment were not sufficiently versed in strategic communications. This workshop, therefore, served as a useful foundation-building exercise, in addition to its original objective of developing the POD's Media Plan for the GCE.

The Media Plan was produced and submitted to the BoC for approval. It calls for the production of a spectrum of outreach material, including website advertisements, short message service (SMS) notifications, social media products, and even an animated public service announcement. The GEO sub-plans were extensions of this model and contained similar information, though tailored for the specific audiences of a particular governorate.

Participants also discussed the 2010 VRU media plan and 56 recommendations made by the BoC on media plan development. These recommendations include such items as “exhibit the voter list on the IHEC website” and “publish the candidacy regulations in the media outlets.” This useful discussion session provided participants with a forum to discuss options and content for future media plans, with particularly valuable contributions from GEO representatives who were able to share their insights with each other and with the NO.

Furthermore, there were also several corollary outcomes that will inform and enhance the POD capacity building process moving forward:

- For the first time the GEOs were brought into the planning process at an early stage and were able to provide substantive input into the final outcome;
- Evidence-based strategic planning and market surveys were acknowledged as fundamental to the communications budgeting and planning process;
- New media was incorporated into the POD media planning budget;
- The special role of the public service broadcaster, the Iraqi Media Network, (IMN) was acknowledged, which has implications for budgets and plan content;
- The specific needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities, such as people with disabilities (PWDs) – the first PWDs were considered as a specific outreach target group – women, and youth were addressed in a productive manner.

This workshop stands as one of IFES’ key accomplishments this quarter. Along with a POD Media Plan, which was approved by the BoC shortly after the workshop, IFES advisors were able to gain valuable insight into how the IHEC will fare in the larger strategic communication planning process. Though initial abilities were not impressive, the eagerness with which the IHEC personnel absorbed the information bodes well for further, related activities.

3.3.2: Development of a corporate brand as a professional and independent election management body

Alongside the strategic communications development, IFES External Media Advisor also worked with the IHEC counterparts on the creation of an “IHEC brand.”

However, the IHEC branding process is proceeding very slowly. The main stakeholder to any communications process is the Board of Commissioners, and they are not as well versed with electoral public relations as they are with electoral operations. IFES is working with mid-level IHEC staff to secure approval for a presentation to the new BOC on communications and public relations to remedy this.

In the meantime, IFES is providing ongoing communication strategy sessions in what is proving to be a highly popular on-the-job training. Participants in these sessions have agreed that persuading the BoC on the importance public relations is a key priority.

Activity 3.4: Capacity building training in the design, implementation, and conduct of voter information and educational programs

IFES External Relations team was very busy with voter information and education activities this quarter. Several accomplishments were made. The first was the establishment of a Website Working Group (WWG). The second was the initiation of discussions with Yahoo! over interactive content. The third accomplishment was the development of a branded line of training and informational material.

3.4.1: Training program on voter education methodologies and use of new media for public outreach

In early September, IFES successfully convened the first meeting of the Website Working Group. The WWG is made up of representatives from the POD, the Complaints Department, and the Graphic Design Section, along with the IFES external relations staff. IFES has also invited the UN to participate, along with representatives from the Translation Department and Database Management Section.

The goal of the WWG is to guide technical and procedural development of the IHEC website. The WWG immediately took up the issue of re-launching the IHEC website, which has been down for several months. At the time of reporting, the WWG was leading efforts to acquire a waiver from the Ministry of Communications, on whose servers the IHEC website is hosted, in order to host the website on a commercial server. The website can be re-launched as early as next quarter if a waiver is obtained. Unfortunately, IFES is unable to predict the potential outcome of the WWG's efforts in this regard.

In August, IFES' initiated discussions with Yahoo! over concessionary pricing on rates for banner ads as part of the advertising campaign for the GCE. The IHEC has also authorized the use of social media and the POD has started conceptual work on the institution's Facebook page. Once the page is established, advertising banners for the VRU and voting will be developed by Graphic Design staff.

3.4.2 Review and production of outreach and voter information materials

In this quarter, IFES External Media Advisor has worked closely with the IHEC's Graphic Design Section (part of the POD) on developing a branded series of informational and training material. This work included collaboration with the Electoral Media Section on developing a first draft of this material, which was accomplished mid-way through the reporting period. This material comes in the form of three rubrics: Election Advisory; Election Training; and, Election Education and is being designed for three audiences, including external stakeholders, internal trainers, and general population. A sample of the material is displayed below.

In addition to this IFES-led activity, the IHEC has also made progress in enhancing inter-Departmental cooperation on voter education. In late August, the Graphic Design Section, Training and Procedures Department, and Electoral Media Section agreed to work together to produce educational and informational material. The initiative was endorsed by the POD Director and included the materials to be developed to a master list previously developed by the

POD Working Group. The UN's Capacity Building Advisor has also been closely involved with facilitating collaboration.

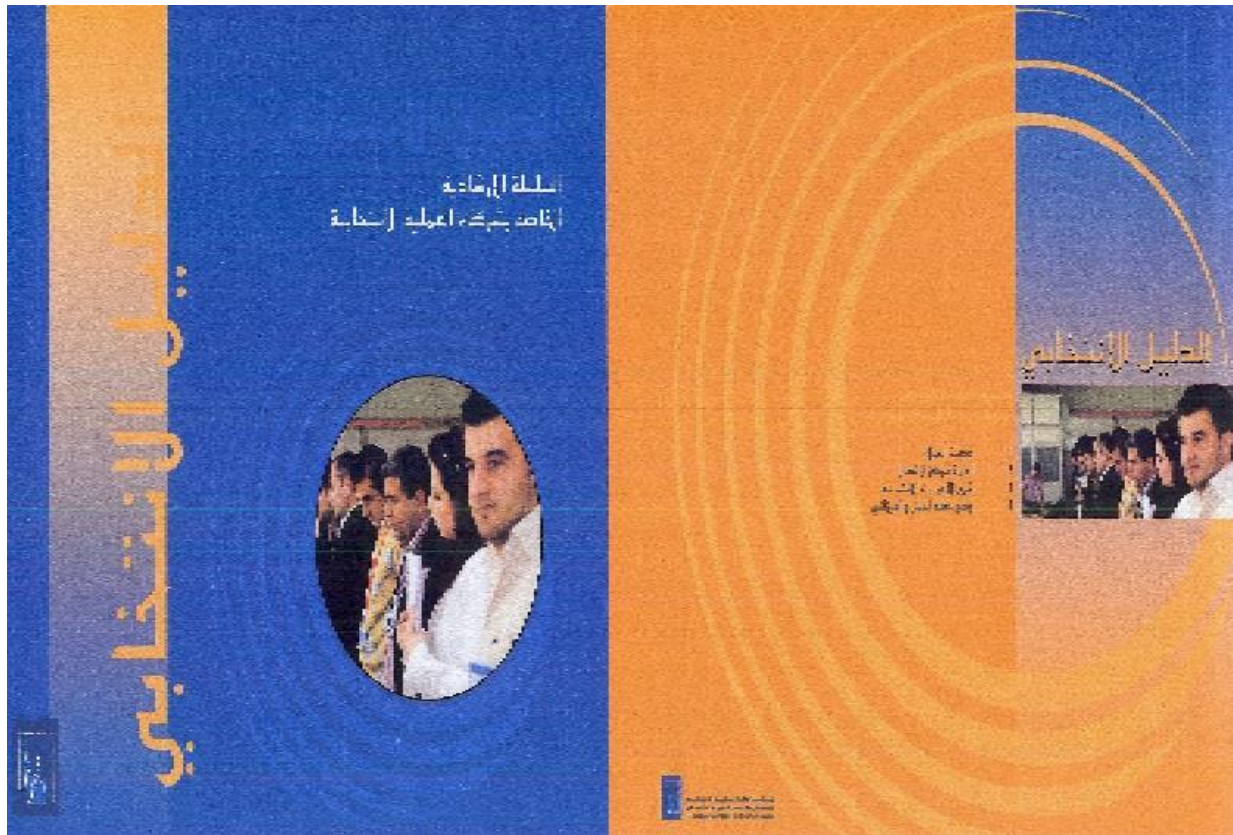


Figure 3: IFES-IHEC Draft Voter Education Material

Activity 3.7: Civil society sub-grants program

IFES continued preparations for its sub-grants program this quarter and, critically, received USAID approval for the Request for Applications on 17 September, 2012.

As the approval process was going on, IFES planned its informational sessions for interested civil society organizations (CSOs) to attend and learn about the sub-grant program. Sessions will take place in Baghdad, Basrah, and Erbil. It was IFES' intention to hold a seminar somewhere in Anbar as well, but security considerations precluded this. In early October, IFES staff will travel to Basrah and Erbil for the first sessions.

The sessions will include presentations by IFES' Contracts, Grants, and Procurement Officer and Grants Management Assistant. A sample of the presentation, given in Arabic, is below. The slide explains potential activities and programs for which the sub-grants will provide funding.

IFES expects to release the first funds before the end of the calendar year.



Figure 4: Sample slide from IFES Sub-Grant Informational Seminar

IV. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

IFES expects to carry out a number of trainings on electoral operations and public outreach in the next quarter. While ultimate execution of these workshops will be influenced by the GCE preparations, IFES is planning to facilitate the workshops in the table below.

Table 2: IFES-Facilitated Workshops, October – December 2012⁵

Workshop title	Targeted group (# of participants)	Venue	Duration	Proposed date
GEO Preparation	NO Directors, GEO Directors, Section Heads from Complaints, Legal and Procurement sections at NO	Erbil International Hotel	3 days	19 October
DEC Infrastructure Training	NO DEC staff	Baghdad	TBD	November or December
Public Outreach Media	POD and GEO Media Officers (30)	TBD	TBD	November
New Media Strategies	POD, Graphic Design Section, CBD (20)	TBD	TBD	November or December
POD Training on Supporting PWDs	Public Relations Section	Baghdad	1 day	December

⁵ This chart is indicative of IFES workshops in the next quarter. Dates and content are subject to change pending operational requirements and IHEC approvals.

V. QUARTERLY PROJECT BURN RATE

VI. CRITICAL ASSUMPTIONS UPDATE

IFES operates under a number of critical assumptions, which are separated into three contexts: political, security, and operational.⁶ As established in the Project Implementation Plan (PMP), IFES reviews the applicability of these assumptions and monitors their influence on the program.

The following assumption, which is rooted in the operational context, was challenged this past quarter:

The appointment of a new Board of Commissioners in 2012 will occur without delays or disruptions that may have repercussions for the functioning and general operations of the IHEC.

As relayed above and in the previous Quarterly Report, the delayed selection of the BoC has impacted IFES and the IHEC activities considerably. However, with the first year of the project concluding, IFES can sum the impact of the delayed appointment of the BoC as follows:

- **Strategic Planning activities in FY12 have been severely delayed:** The first year project implementation plan (PIP) called for IFES to initiate several activities under Objective 1: IHEC's Strategic Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity is Strengthened. Had these activities been completed, IFES would have likely met its target indicators falling under this objective⁷. This did not happen. Acting in agreement with USAID, nearly all of the activities related to Objective 1 were postponed pending the selection of a new BoC. This was done to avoid alienating new Commissioners regarding long-term planning. Their buy-in is essential in this process and moving ahead without new Commissioners would have been an ineffective use of public funds. IFES has, however, put into place virtually all preparatory pieces in order for activities under this Objective to begin after GCE elections.
- **Long-term institution building activities may be influenced in Q1FY13:** The new BoC has considerable technical experience, as most of them have been drawn from within the IHEC. Given this, they are eager to demonstrate to the GoI and to Iraqi voters that they are competent. Unfortunately, this eagerness has impacted their focus on long-term institution building. IFES will continue to push the IHEC to take seriously long-term planning and hopes to invite the new USAID/Iraq Mission Director to the IHEC in early October to support this effort.

In addition to the above, it is important to note now that another critical assumption, also in the operational context, may be challenged in the coming months:

⁶ For a full listing of the critical assumptions underlying this project and their contextual arrangement, please see IFES' Performance Management Plan.

⁷ See Appendices B and C for IFES performance indicators for Q4FY12

The IHEC will continue to seek IFES' assistance as stipulated in an agreed upon Memorandum of Understanding negotiated by USAID and the IHEC, and the Board of Commissioners will continue to grant approval for activities as stipulated in such an MoU, in this proposal and IFES' work plans.

It should be clear that IFES has had no issues with carrying out its activities thus far. Indeed, and as a testament to the leadership of IFES Iraq, IFES enjoys warm and productive relations with the IHEC. However, these good relations cannot be guaranteed moving forward. IFES operated within the IHEC for a year outside of an MoU between USAID and the IHEC. This may only be because no elections were scheduled, thereby reducing the level of scrutiny directed at the IHEC's administration of elections.⁸ As there will be elections in FY13, more Iraqis will be looking at the IHEC's operations and some observers may be critical of a US-funded NGO working inside their country's electoral management body. Disingenuous politicians may seek to earn political points by taking firm stances against such assistance. It is therefore imperative that, in the months to come, USAID and the IHEC make progress on concluding an MoU.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

With the first year of programming complete, IFES can provide the following conclusions about the technical electoral environment:

- **Institution building must continue:** As reported above and in previous reports from IFES, the IHEC must remain focused on building the institutional capacity of the IHEC, in addition to advancing its operational capacity. Financial systems, HR policies, and, perhaps most critically, Information Technology, are all in various states of development. IFES has made considerable strides in improving each of these areas and will continue to create a demand for its assistance in this regard, but the IHEC must remain aware that while it's *raison d'être* is election operations, the sustainability of the institution will only be ensured when it is run efficiently and transparently.
- **Public outreach is key:** Recent studies have shown that millions of people in Iraq utilize Facebook every day.⁹ This presents an opportunity to reach an immense swath of voters and potential voters – most of whom are young males. The IHEC should take seriously public outreach if it is to safeguard its independence. IFES plans to work with the IHEC on new media early in the next quarter, including supporting the development of the IHEC's institutional Facebook page, which will allow the millions of Iraqis with Facebook accounts to interact with the IHEC.
- **The voter registry must be improved:** IFES, alongside the UN, will be working with the IHEC to sort out the myriad problems with the voter registry. IFES will provide technical assistance on software to be used to update the current voter list ahead of

⁸ This does not mean that the IHEC was out of public view in the past 12 months; on the contrary, in fact. As covered in previous Quarterly Reports, several public inquiries were made against the IHEC this past year, though they were generally directed at Commissioners personally and relatively unrelated to electoral operations.

⁹ <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/iraq> (Last accessed 12 October)

electoral event. The system is fully developed by IHEC programmers, mainly by staff member from IHEC's Database Management section. Its first beta (draft) version was released and being tested for functionality. The IFES and UN advisors continuously assisted the software developers throughout the development process. The assistance include: advise and assist throughout the development process, reviews of the written code and development approaches, discussions and plans for the test and debugging (Error Fixing), and recommendation for code and system optimization. Among other actions, the system should go through unit and module level testing, bugs should be identified and fixed. Stress tests and simulations should be used to test the software, followed by debugging.

VIII. ANNEXES TO NARRATIVE

- Cover Memo
- Appendix A—FY12 Data and Performance Indicators
- Appendix B—Performance Indicator Reference Sheets (PIRS)
- Appendix C—Performance Data Tables
- Appendix D—Workshop Data for FY12
- Security Personnel Contracts Table
- Sub-activity Reporting Table
- Sub-contract Nationality Table
- Organizational Chart